

HIGHLIGHTS OF PASSED BILLS:

Breast Cancer (HB 1269) – Establishes a public education and outreach initiative

Health Insurance (SB 1122) - Expands the pool of health care service providers to whom an insurer would be required to make direct payment to include non-network providers.

Property Insurance – (HB 1495) Limits rate hike on Citizen's Insurance to 10% per year; (HB 1171) allows insurers to sell policies with higher rate and eliminates Citizen's Insurance assessments.

Seat Belts (SB 344)– Makes failure to wear a seatbelt a primary offense

Telecommunications (SB 2626) – Provides expansion of broadband internet service and makes several changes to framework for local telephone service.

Unemployment (SB 810) – Allows state to accept a portion of federal stimulus money so that qualified workers will receive an additional 13 to 20 weeks of unemployment.



The Waldman Times 2009



Dear friends and neighbors:

The recently ended 2009 legislative session was one of the toughest on record. My priorities throughout the session were to focus on Florida's economic recovery, creating new jobs, public education, health care, public safety and fighting for middle-class families and those who need the services of our state.

In writing a new state budget, we faced a \$6 billion revenue shortfall. The Legislature responded by reducing programs and services, draining trust funds and increasing fees, many of which will impact working-class families. For these and other reasons, I voted against the budget because I don't think it adequately met our state's needs.

However, I am pleased that my top priority, a new cigarette user fee, was approved. I am also pleased that the Legislature approved a bill allowing Governor Charlie Crist to negotiate a compact with the Seminole Tribe. The bill gives the governor guidelines as to those issues that need to be included in the compact. The compact will not only bring in money to help education, but will bring money to the cities in my district that are affected by the presence of the Coconut Creek Casino. More details about the cigarette fee are included in this newsletter.

This year, my colleagues and I in the Florida House of Representatives undertook a number of serious initiatives that will improve the lives of our friends and neighbors: We championed legislative efforts to crack down on the illegal sale of prescription drugs. We repeatedly demanded that education funding not be cut despite tough economic circumstances. Throughout the session, we fought for seniors and people who rely on health care services, and won approval for legislation to require Medigap coverage for certain patients needing dialysis or kidney transplants.

It has been a pleasure to serve the citizens of Coconut Creek, Coral Springs, Margate, Pompano Beach and Tamarac in the Legislature and I look forward to next year's session as well as your continued support.

Sincerely,

Jim Waldman

For further information on these issues, those summarized in the newsletter, or any other state issues addressed during this legislative session, please do not hesitate to call my office at 954-956-5600, or email me at jim.waldman@myfloridahouse.gov.

THE FLORIDA BUDGET

A debate over how to resolve a \$6-billion budget deficit due to the economic slowdown dominated a very challenging 2009 legislative session. What resulted is a \$66.5 billion budget that provides spending for important initiatives but fails to adequately meet the needs of Florida and District 95.

The budget that passed the Legislature will raise taxes, fees and university tuition, drains trust funds, and cut programs crucial to meeting the needs of our people, especially seniors and those who rely on our state’s health care services.

I had hoped for a much better outcome for Florida, and that’s why I voted “no” to this budget’s final passage.



Rep. Waldman discusses budget procedures with several House members

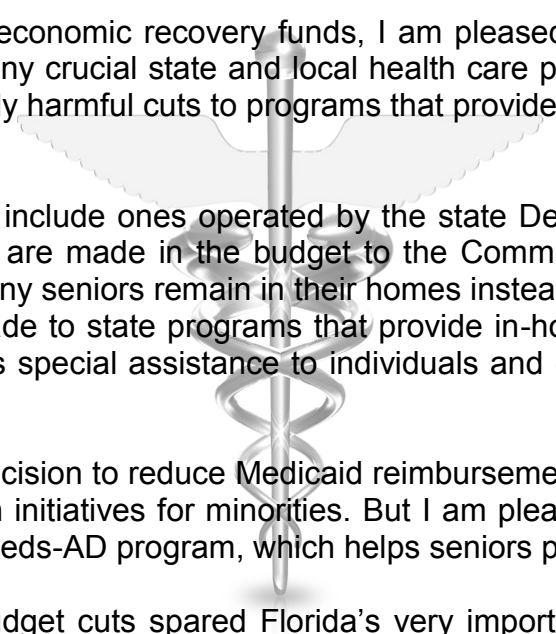
HEALTH CARE

With the help of federal economic recovery funds, I am pleased that the Legislature met obligations to finance many crucial state and local health care programs. But I am deeply disappointed by potentially harmful cuts to programs that provide health services to Florida seniors.

Programs that will suffer include ones operated by the state Department of Elder Affairs. For instance, sharp cuts are made in the budget to the Community Care for the Elderly program, which helps many seniors remain in their homes instead of nursing facilities. Severe cuts will also be made to state programs that provide in-home care and daily meals for the elderly, as well as special assistance to individuals and caregivers living with Alzheimer’s disease.

I am distressed by the decision to reduce Medicaid reimbursement rates to nursing homes and a cut to some health initiatives for minorities. But I am pleased by our successful efforts to fund the state’s Meds-AD program, which helps seniors purchase medications.

Also, I’m grateful that budget cuts spared Florida’s very important Medically Needy program, which provides essential health care for low-income families.



EDUCATION

I worked tirelessly alongside my colleagues in the Legislature to secure much-needed funds for Florida’s schools, teachers and students, and I am proud of our efforts.

I am pleased that the Legislature has put to use nearly \$2 billion in federal economic recovery funds approved by President Barack Obama’s administration. These dollars will help give schools and teachers the resources they need in hopes that we will one day have a world-class education system.



House members of the Broward Delegation

I hope that we can improve education funding. The proposed Fiscal Year 2009-10 state budget increases per-student spending only modestly, reaching a statewide average of \$6,873. We can do better, especially considering Florida school funding has fallen since the Fiscal Year 2007-08 level of \$7,128 per student.

CIGARETTE USER FEE

It took three years of convincing my colleagues to help pass this legislation. The bill raises the fee on cigarettes by \$1 per pack. Florida presently spends over 1.25 billion dollars on tobacco related illnesses. This fee will raise nearly one billion dollars in new revenue, which will be matched by 2 billion dollars from the federal government and will be used for Medicaid programs.



Rep. Waldman speaks at an American Cancer Society Rally.

Although our state faced a dramatic budget shortfall this year and this new revenue source will bring in money to help prevent us from cutting even more programs, I am especially pleased that passage of this fee will have a great effect on our children’s future health. Statistics show that for every 10% increase in the price of cigarettes there are an estimated 7% fewer youth who will begin smoking. Less youth smoking means less Medicaid costs due to tobacco related illnesses in the future. Hopefully, the higher prices will also encourage people to give up smoking. Passage of this fee is a win-win situation.